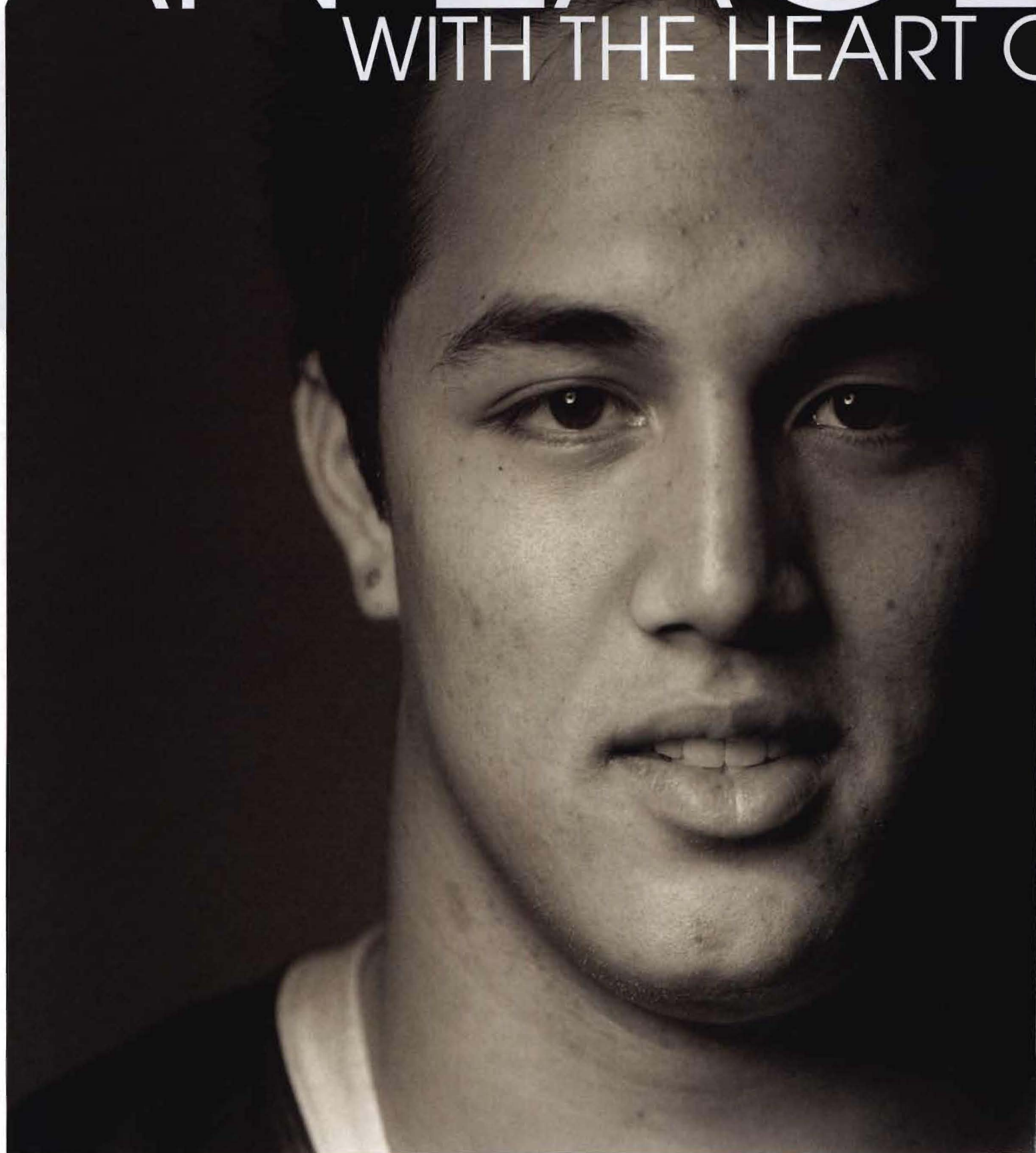


AN EAGLE

WITH THE HEART OF



OF A MUSTANG

B Y J O A N N L L O Y D

THE SUMMER MONTHS ARE NOTORIOUSLY HOT AND STICKY in Eastern Pennsylvania – a far cry from the cool ocean breezes that **Chris Gocong** (ENGR '06) grew up with in the California coastal town of Carpinteria.

Gocong wasn't complaining, though, as he sweated through workouts at Lehigh University, site of the Philadelphia Eagles' preseason training camp, in July. Dealing with widely divergent climates, after all, is a routine part of life in the National Football League.

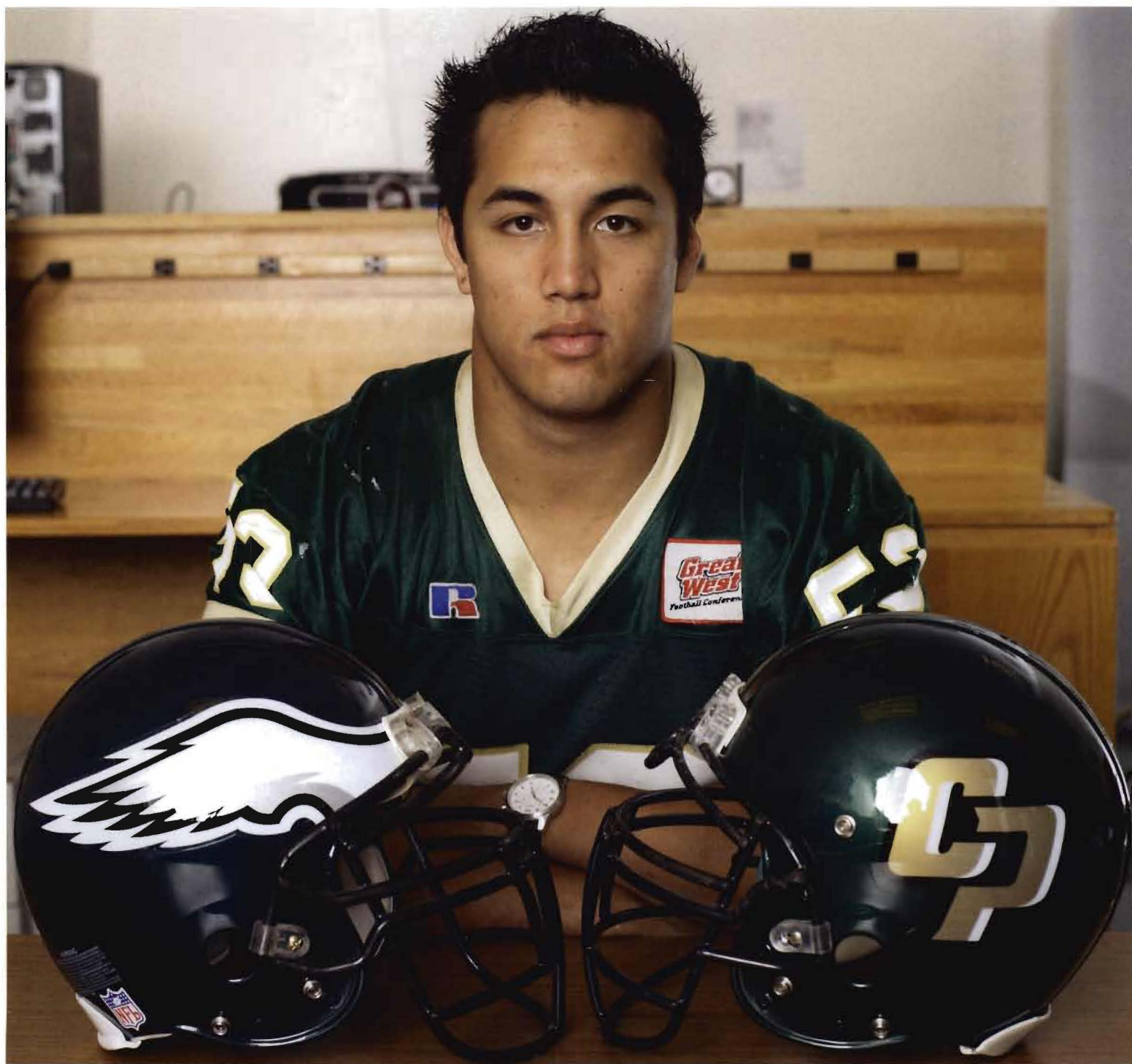
"Lehigh was everything I was told it would be," said the former Mustang defensive end-turned pro football linebacker. "It was hot, it was humid – some days it felt like 100 degrees. But it was fun, it was a great experience. Now it's cooling off here and I'm getting ready for the cold."

Drafted by the Eagles last spring, Gocong headed East immediately after completing his finals and earning a bachelor's degree in engineering with a specialization in biomedical engineering.

Although the first day of the NFL draft ended well for him – he was selected in the third round – the process wasn't without drama.

"I was watching the draft on TV at home in Carpinteria," Gocong recalled. "The team is supposed to call you a few minutes ahead of time, before the information appears on TV. The New York Jets were trying to pick me. I was talking on the phone to one of their coaches, and another call was coming through from another team. I didn't know which team. While I was talking to the Jets, I saw my name appear on TV and learned that the Philadelphia Eagles had picked me. At first, I had no idea what had happened or what team I was going to be playing on."

It wasn't long before he – and football fans everywhere – found out: In July the 23-year-old signed a four-year contract worth nearly \$2.4 million. Coming as it did in the wake of his selection in the draft, the contract only added to Gocong's celebrity status on California's Central Coast.



Friend and former Mustang teammate Kyle Shotwell says Gocong hasn't – and won't – let any of it go to his head, though. "You couldn't ask for a better teammate. He never thought of himself as different or better," said Shotwell.

Indeed, Gocong appears to have his head – and his helmet – on straight. Before he graduated, Gocong and three former Cal Poly football players donated money toward the renovation of the Alex G. Spanos Stadium.

Head Football Coach Rich Ellerson says the vast majority of recent Mustang players have strong feelings about their experiences at Cal Poly.

"They are grateful for the education, the opportunity to play

the game they love, and the friendships that will last a lifetime," he said. "They are proud to be Cal Poly graduates. They are young leaders who find themselves early in life in a position financially to make a tangible statement about how much their time here has meant to them and demonstrate the virtue of giving back."

Gocong agrees. "I got a free education, an opportunity to play in the NFL," he said. "The least I can do is give something back. And I wanted to set an example for other alumni to follow."

Gocong knows a thing or two about examples, and about the value of hard work, thanks mostly to his mother, who raised him and his older brother while working as an accountant. Hard work always pays off, he believes. "I really admire

Jerry Rice,” he said of the Hall of Fame receiver, who spent 21 years in the NFL, mostly with the San Francisco 49ers. “He might not be the best athlete,” Gocong said, “but he is a hard worker. Hard work will get you pretty far in life.”

How far Gocong gets on the football field could depend on how he bounces back from a herniated disk in his neck. The condition bedeviled him throughout much of the summer and the Eagles ultimately placed him on injured reserve, sidelining him for the season.

“It’s unfortunate, but it could end up helping me,” Gocong said. “This gives me an opportunity to rebuild and learn the defense here.”

Those who know him best say it would take a lot to keep the 6-foot, 3-inch 250-pounder off the field for long. “He’s relentless,” Shotwell said. “He never gives up. He’s like a non-stop motor. He’s just a phenomenal athlete – big, fast, strong – the complete package; an unstoppable force.”

Coach Ellerson agrees, calling Gocong “tenacious.”

“Literally every NFL scout to come through commented on how hard Chris played. He is an explosive athlete and a remarkably productive pass rusher, but I believe it’s his effort that elevated his play to such heights.”

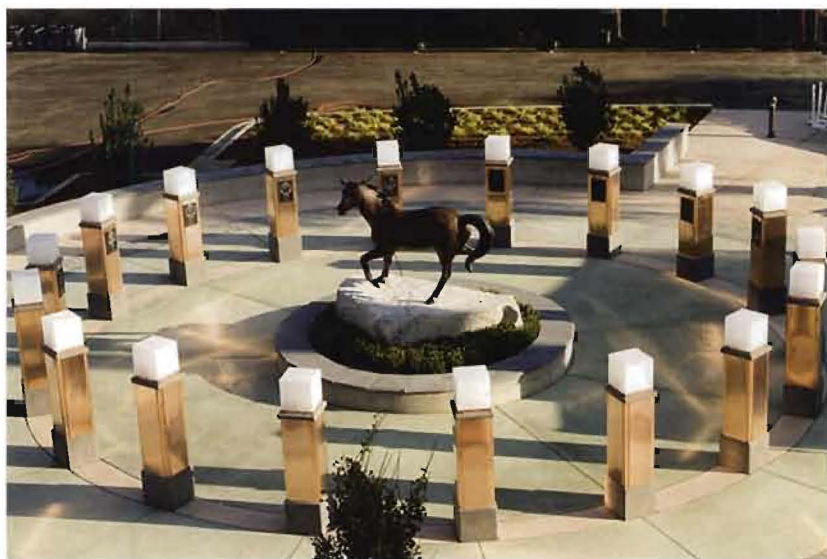
Ellerson realized Gocong’s potential during his junior season. “He was becoming a dominant player at his position at the same time teammate Jordan Beck was becoming someone the NFL was clearly going to draft,” Ellerson recalled. Beck was drafted by the Atlanta Falcons in 2005, after receiving the 2004 Buck Buchanan Award. Gocong won the award, which goes to the best defensive player at the Division I-AA level, in 2005.

“I believe Gocong has what it takes to have an NFL career, but as we all know, those are both brief and fragile. One of the great things about Chris is that no matter how long he plays or how much money he makes, when he hangs up his cleats for the last time, his best days will still be ahead of him,” Ellerson said.

Gocong, too, knows that playing the gridiron is an inherently ephemeral pursuit. “Football isn’t a 20-year-career. An average career is three to four years,” he conceded. “If everything goes right, hopefully I’ll still be playing ball in 10 years, or I might be working for a biomedical company.” □

CHRIS GOCONG AT A GLANCE

- 23 years old
- 6 feet 3 inches, 250 pounds
- Born in Lancaster, California
- Attended Carpinteria High School
- Enrolled at Cal Poly at age 17, on a full football scholarship
- Registered 23 ½ sacks as a senior, an NCAA Division I-AA and Cal Poly record
- 2005 Buck Buchanan Award winner
- 42 career sacks, an NCAA Division I-AA and Cal Poly record
- Picked 71st overall in the 2005 NFL draft



STADIUM GETS AN UPGRADE, NEW MONIKER

MUSTANG STADIUM HAS BEEN RENAMED the Alex G. Spanos Stadium in recognition of the Spanos family’s generous support of athletics at Cal Poly. Spanos, an aerospace engineering alumnus, entrepreneur and owner of the San Diego Chargers, and his wife, Faye, contributed \$8 million to the \$21.5-million renovation project – the largest single gift in the history of Cal Poly Athletics.

The couple previously funded the Harold P. and Rosalie Davidson scholarship endowment and donated \$1.5 million

ALEX G. SPANOS STADIUM IS A CONCRETE AND STEEL-FRAME FACILITY WITH SEATING FOR 10,000.

toward the renovation of Davidson Music Center and the Cal Poly Theatre, since renamed the Alex and Faye Spanos Theatre.

The Alex G. Spanos Stadium is a concrete and steel-frame facility with seating for 10,000. It houses Mustang Memorial Field, where the Mustangs defeated rival UC Davis this year to capture the Golden Horseshoe trophy.

Mustang Memorial Plaza, located at the entrance to the stadium, is a permanent memorial to the 18 individuals who lost their lives in a plane crash on Oct. 29, 1960. The 15,000-square-foot plaza is anchored by a striking bronze sculpture of a mustang created by Roy Harris – aptly titled “Unbridled Spirit” – which stands at the center of a “team huddle” created by a circle of 18 pillars, each representing one of the 16 players, the Mustang booster and the team manager who perished.

Each of the 18 pillars stands at the height of its honoree and displays a granite plaque engraved with a yearbook photo and personal information. □